



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senate
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the orphan county situation in your district. I have long been a supporter of over-the-air broadcast TV stations and the service that they provide to consumers. And I understand the frustrations that some consumers face when they cannot access the broadcast TV stations they desire through their cable or satellite provider—particularly during the national COVID-19 pandemic.

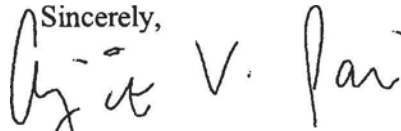
Congress has specifically determined through the Communications Act which TV stations are considered “local” to a particular area and thus required to be carried by a cable or satellite provider. As you note, Garrett County residents generally receive the TV stations assigned to the Pittsburgh, PA Designated Market Area. But your constituents could have access to in-state signals under existing statutes and rules. For example, two cable operators that provide service to Garrett County, Shentel and Somerfield Cable, each carry the Maryland PBS station, WGPT (PBS), Oakland, Maryland. The satellite carriers also could carry WGPT into Garrett County because the station is an in-market station, but are not required to do so. Additionally, WGPT has a strong digital over-the-air signal in Garrett County and should be viewable to residents with an over-the-air antenna.

Congress also gave certain parties the ability to petition the Commission to modify the communities in a commercial television station’s local market if a petitioner can show it meets specific statutory factors. Such petitions can be filed by a broadcaster, cable operator, or satellite provider—or the county government in the case of a satellite market modification petition. If the Commission grants a market modification petition, the additional commercial station signals can be carried as local stations with the consent of the station.

As a result, you could contact the county government and encourage them to file a satellite market modification petition with the FCC to add Garrett County to the markets for commercial TV stations otherwise serving the state of Maryland. Or you could contact Maryland broadcast stations and encourage them to file a cable and/or satellite market modification petition with the FCC to add Garrett County to their market.

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Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai



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April 30, 2020

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

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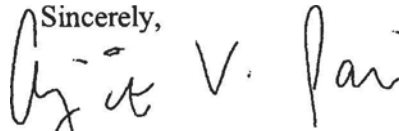
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